Washington Today

F Post 10-4-72

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WASHINGTON — At last a committee of Congress has taken a step to stop Americans from dealing with the enemies of the United States in the midst of a war.

The House Internal Security Committee has approved a bill which would prohibit any citizen of this country from traveling to nations engaged in armed conflict with the United States unless authorized by the President after he had determined whether the trip was in the national interest. Violators would be subject to 10 years in prison, a $10,000 fine, or both.

The action by the committee, which could be followed soon by passage in the House and Senate, is aimed at those who have been in communication with officials in North Vietnam and who have been told by their friends or misguided advisers that it is proper to go there.

Unquestionably, North Vietnam has used innocent persons as instruments for its propaganda and has convinced some members of the families of prisoners of war that there was nothing improper about their trips.

Richard M. Ichord, Democrat of Missouri, who is chairman of the House Internal Security Committee, has expressed the hope that passage of the bill would "stem the venomous flow of statements emanating from the mouths of American citizens on the soil of the enemy."

While the measure is aimed at the activists in the antiwar groups, it could be an obstacle to further traveling to North Vietnam by relatives of prisoners of war. Visits of this kind might be made by citizens of neutral nations and by such organizations as the international red cross which have long had humanitarian missions as their objective.

The Hanoi government arranged for some relatives of prisoners to come to North Vietnam and secured statements which are filled with unwitting propaganda that the visiting individuals probably thought would do no harm but might secure the release of the prisoners.

The Communists, however, through their news agency, spread the comments throughout the world and quote Americans as criticizing their own government.

The propaganda machine of the Communists, moreover, has had opportunities to use the names of prominent Americans who have visited there and openly condemned their own country.

The effort to divide American public opinion by the use of propaganda has been going on for some time. But it has not been until recently that so many opportunities were afforded the North Vietnamese to get the benefit of interviews with well-known Americans. All this has produced resentment in Congress, and hence the bill was approved by the committee after a 45-minute hearing.

To denounce the United States while a prisoner under compulsion in Hanoi would be one thing. But some visitors have returned to America and continued their defense of North Vietnam with arguments supporting the military adversary of their own country in a war that has been going on for several years. This has rarely occurred in previous conflicts.

It is surprising that Congress has not moved on this issue before. For the impression conveyed by those Americans who have deliberately gone to North Vietnam, talked with officials there about the problem of the prisoners or other matters related to the war, and then gave interviews with adverse comments about their own government is something that has stirred up a lot of ill-feeling throughout the nation, as well as in Congress.

It is questionable whether all this will help the release of the prisoners when the negotiations at Paris are resumed in earnest. Hanoi has mistakenly assumed that the American people were swinging away from the administration and would not be willing to continue the war.

But the South Vietnamese are still growing stronger, and the advisory aid given by the United States and its airpower will be available if any new offensives are started against South Vietnam.

There is confidence here that, once the election is over in this country, there will be a clearer view of America's position in support of South Vietnam than there is today.

This, it is believed, will bring the influence of Peking and Moscow into the picture and during 1973 will force North Vietnam to end the war.